

BOOK REVIEWS

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT, 2nd edition, by David Briggs, Peter Smithson, Kenneth Addison and Ken Atkinson, Routledge, London, 1997. No of pages xxxii+559. Price: £19.99 (pb). ISBN 0-415-10890-X

AN INTRODUCTION TO GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, 2nd edition, by Kevin T. Pickering and Lewis A. Owen, Routledge, London, 1997. No. of pages: xxx+512. Price: £17.99 (pb). ISBN 0-415-14099-4.

It is tempting to begin with the prejudice that second editions don't always work – certainly from my own experience, it is difficult to recapture what you thought and wrote some time ago. However, it is two additional authors who have revised Briggs and Smithson's *Fundamentals of Physical Geography* as *Fundamentals of the Physical Environment*. The original authors cite the Teaching Quality Assessment and Research Assessment Exercise as reasons for not having the time to revise it themselves.

Fundamentals is divided into several chapters concerned with weather and climate, rocks, weathering, erosion, soils, vegetation and ecosystems, and with polar, mountains, Mediterranean, dryland and humid tropical regions. *Introduction Global Environmental Issues* is divided into fewer, larger sections: climate change, global atmospheric change, acidic deposition, water resources and pollution, nuclear issues, energy, natural hazards, human impact and managing the earth.

As with the first edition of Briggs and Smithson, I shall certainly continue to recommend the text for climatology. There is nothing comparable in terms of clarity, accessibility and user-friendliness. I am pleased that the new edition is seamless in this respect of retaining something I have come to rely on. Many undergraduates find climatology difficult and frankly some other texts (for example, Barry and Chorley, 1992), however authoritative, put them off. As for other subjects, I feel that there are many other introductory texts which cover them as well or better. The reasons for recommending the new edition would largely be ones of economy – it is all in one book which provides the basic information. This is especially so when students continue to arrive at university with A levels which leave them with holes in what we assume to be their basic knowledge. However, they might be well advised to read chapters in David Waugh's (1990) book for the material they didn't cover. But, yes, I will continue to recommend *Fundamentals* to first year undergraduates for its coverage of that basic information which they lack.

Reference to climatology reminded me that I once reviewed Kemp's (1990) climate book. This I saw as useful as it presented basic climatology in an appealing environmental context. If modern undergraduates are turned off by science, and are only excited by management, environment and themes which involve human dimensions (and this is not without supporting evidence), then Kemp is a good source for students to learn about climatology. Obviously, the parallel thought about Pickering and Owen occurs to me. It looks more appealing than Briggs *et al.* However, they are meant to be different books, one on the physical environment and one on environmental issues; I can see students picking up *Issues* and finding it more 'relevant' (it is also cheaper!). I guess one recommends both books, and if first year students ask 'which should I buy?', the answer is *Issues* if they have done a sound traditional A level covering the basics, but if they have done a more issue-based A level, they should make sure they know the basics and buy *Fundamentals* (and then at least they will know something about geomorphology!).

This evaluation of these two books perhaps reveals as much about my feelings about A levels as it does about the books. Environmental issues have great appeal, even given an element of 'green backlash' together with the 'environmental indoctrination' and 'greenwash' discussed in the press recently, ideas which suggest that some environmental issues might have been over-stated. However, one remains aghast at the ignorance of fundamentals of physical geography in some first year undergraduates. Students should know both about fundamental environmental processes as well as about environmental issues; both of these books cover them well, and therefore both might be appropriate texts. Even *Environmental Issues* is very physically based, though paying little attention to issues such as those of social equity and gender which seem so readily to attract undergraduates today. At least *Fundamentals* will not go out of date so readily.

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REFERENCES

- Barry, R. G and Chorley R. J. 1992. *Atmosphere, Weather and Climate*, 6 edition, Methuen, London.
Kemp, D. D. 1990. *Global Environmental Issues: A Climatological Approach*, Routledge, London.
Waugh, D. 1990. *Geography: an Integrated Approach*, Nelson, London.